

T'chicha (Barley and Tomato Soup)

By Nargisse Benkabbou



Kelly Marshall for The New York Times. Food Stylist: Roscoe Betsill. Prop Stylist: Paige Hicks.

Time 55 minutes

Rating 4 ★★★★★ (339)

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This simple soup, which comes from the Amazigh, or Berber, community of North Africa, perfectly demonstrates how just a few ingredients can create a wholesome and comforting meal. Pearl barley has a distinctive taste and texture that once cooked, naturally thickens soups and gives them a creamy consistency. The sweetness of the paprika and tomatoes against the boldness of the thyme and pearl barley give this soup its special flavor and appeal. The dried thyme is added at the end of the cooking process to preserve its aromas. Feel free to customize your t'chicha by adding your choice of chopped vegetables such as eggplant or zucchini and proteins such as cooked chicken or beef.

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INGREDIENTS

PREPARATION

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

3 tablespoons olive oil, more to serve

1 large yellow onion, diced into ¼-inch pieces

1¼ cups pearl barley

½ (14-ounce) can crushed tomatoes (or 2 medium tomatoes, cored and diced into ½-inch pieces)

2 garlic cloves, grated

2½ teaspoons sweet paprika

1½ teaspoon fine sea salt or more to taste

5 cups vegetable stock (or water)

1 teaspoon dried thyme

Fresh thyme for garnish (optional)

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RATINGS

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Step 1

Add the olive oil to a large pot over medium-low. Add the onion, cover the pan, and cook stirring occasionally, until the onion is soft and translucent, about 7 minutes.

Step 2

Add the pearl barley, canned tomatoes, garlic, sweet paprika, salt and stock. Bring to a boil over high. Reduce the heat to low, cover with a lid and leave to simmer for 45 minutes or until the barley is fully cooked. At this stage of the cooking process, you might need to add more water progressively to the pot to achieve a soup consistency.

Step 3

Stir in the dried thyme, taste, and adjust the seasoning with salt if necessary. Serve immediately with a generous drizzle of olive oil and a couple of fresh thyme sprigs, if desired.

COOKING NOTES

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